June 2011 NJTPA

mobility MATTERS

Transportation Issues in the NJTPA Region

THE FIRST AND LAST MILE

Helping Commuters Get To and From Transit

The choice between commuting by car or public transportation often comes down to the trip's first and last mile. While trains and buses operating on fixed routes offer potentially attractive commuting options—sparing residents the cost and hassles of driving—if commuters can't conveniently get from their homes to the train or bus, or get to their work destination once their train or bus arrives, taking transit is not a realistic choice. Transportation planners call this the "last mile" problem.

This issue of *Mobility Matters* highlights some of the efforts in northern New Jersey to help commuters make that last mile connection. From grant-assisted private shuttle services to encouraging safe, walkable streets, to infrastructure upgrades at NJ Transit hubs, these efforts are helping make the transit system more accessible and getting many thousands of cars off the roads each day.

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) has been a strong partner with NJ Transit, state and federal transportation

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After Final Curtain at Former Plant, Theater Supplier Works with TMA on New Commute

▶ A Meadowlink shuttle drops off workers in the Harmon Cove area of Secaucus.

Following a nine-decade run in Manhattan, Rose Brand, the maker of stage curtains and backdrops for clients ranging from Broadway shows to "Saturday Night Live," readied for its next act in 2007—relocation across the Hudson. The skyrocketing rents for a large warehousing space like Rose Brand's made the move a financial no-brainer, but worries remained whether the company could hold on to all of its workers, the majority of whom lived in the city.

Rose Brand's new building was a short drive from the Secaucus Junction Train Station in the township's Harmon Cove area, but too far for commuters to walk. Finding a convenient way to connect workers between those two points was key, according to Rose Brand Director of Administration Mitch Gottlieb.

Shortly after the move, the Transportation Management Association (TMA) Meadowlink contacted the company to discuss launching a shuttle from the station to the office area. Gottlieb said his company "jumped at the chance."

The Harmon Cove-Secaucus Junction Shuttle is one of several of its kind run by Meadowlink.

According to Assistant Executive Director Avnish Gupta, Meadowlink matches local employers who are willing to contribute to shuttle

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"By offering more and better options for last-mile travel, we can help ensure that all of the network's components function at their best."

—Morris County Freeholder Gene F. Feyl, NJTPA First Vice Chairman

Last Mile

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agencies, nonprofit organizations and the private sector in helping expand transit opportunities for commuters. As highlighted in this publication, there are a host of last mile commuting options and services in northern New Jersey.

"Plan 2035, the NJTPA's long-range transportation plan for the region, stresses the importance of expanding transit options, supporting walking and biking and making travel safer," said Union County Freeholder and NJTPA Chairman Daniel Sullivan. "With our investments, the NJTPA is looking to give people a better quality of life and help workers leave their cars in the driveway."

Last-mile transportation is also a critical issue for travelers who have special needs or don't own cars. Community shuttles can fill important gaps in areas underserved by public transportation. Northern New Jersey's nonprofit Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) are playing a valuable role in working with private businesses to arrange shuttles that help their workers reach the office each day.

The NJTPA Board of Trustees supports such services through three federal grant programs: Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), geared toward linking low-income workers with job centers; Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ), established to support efforts that lessen traffic and air pollution; and New Freedom, designed to help increase travel options for people with disabilities. In addition, the NJTPA supports the work of its 15 subregions (the 13 counties and two cities represented on its Board) to explore the needs and options for improving access to transit throughout the region.

▶ The NJTPA has programs in place that support shuttles and other services that help commuters reach transit hubs and job centers.

"The NJTPA is looking to give people a better quality of life and help workers leave their cars in the driveway."

—Union County Freeholder Daniel Sullivan, NJTPA Chairman

"Northern New Jersey is home to one of the nation's best-balanced transportation networks, which includes passenger rail service, superhighways and one of the largest bus systems in the U.S.," Morris County Freeholder and NJTPA First Vice Chairman Gene F. Feyl said. "By offering more and better options for last-mile travel, we can help ensure that all of the network's components function at their best."

For more on the NJTPA and its work, visit NJTPA.org. ◆

THE NJTPA is the federally authorized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the 6.6 million people in the 13-county northern New Jersey region. The NJTPA oversees the investment of $1 billion in transportation funding. The NJTPA evaluates and approves proposed transportation improvement projects and provides a forum for interagency cooperation and public input into funding decisions. It also sponsors and conducts studies, assists county planning agencies and monitors compliance with national air quality goals. The NJTPA serves the fourth most populous MPO region in the country. NJTPA Board meetings are held bi-monthly and are open to the public.

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◀ Sussex County's complete streets study seeks to make the roads safer and more accessible for all users in towns like Newton. Bottom, a pedestrian crosses Easton Avenue in Somerset.

NJTPA Studies Help Travelers Finish Their Trips

The NJTPA's Subregional Studies Program has helped develop a variety of solutions for residents and workers trying to complete the last leg of their trips.

The program facilitates collaborative planning efforts between the NJTPA, its partner agencies, counties and municipalities to craft local transportation improvement strategies rooted in Plan 2035, the NJTPA's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

"Sometimes even places with the best-balanced transportation systems are missing important links. This program has helped identify those needs and figure out how best to fill them," said Hunterdon County Freeholder and NJTPA Third Vice Chairman Matthew Holt.

The NJTPA Board of Trustees approved $2.7 million for 11 studies in the FY 2011-12 Subregional Studies Program, and $2.4 million for 11 studies in the FY 2010-11 cycle.

The following FY 2011-12 Subregional Studies contain elements related to last-mile transportation issues:

- **River Road/Hudson Waterfront Corridor Strategy,** Bergen County: Develop concepts for improving mobility along the River Road Corridor in Edgewater and Fort Lee, including options for bettering bicycle and pedestrian access to transit.
- **Liberty State Park Circulator Cost-Benefit Analysis,** Jersey City: Analyze options for transit service from the Liberty State Park light rail station, throughout the 1,200-acre parkarea to nearby residential developments and businesses.
- **Morris Canal Greenway Plan,** Jersey City: Prepare a plan for a bicycle and pedestrian path along the former Morris Canal route. Plan would include links to local transit stops.
- **Route 124 Corridor Transit Access Improvement Study,** Morris County: Study options for improving transit access to the Convent, Madison and Chatham rail stations.
- **Sussex County Complete Streets Study:** Undertake the research necessary to establish a countywide complete streets policy, which will include strategies for safer access to public transportation.

The following FY 2010-11 Subregional Studies contain elements related to last-mile transportation issues:

- **Easton Avenue Corridor Study,** Somerset and Middlesex counties: Focuses on expanding public transportation service between the Bound Brook and New Brunswick train stations and Rutgers University for students and workers. Also emphasizes improving pedestrian/bicycle safety.
- **Ocean County Pedestrian Strategies:** Examines strategies for connecting the Barnegat Branch Trail to the Toms River business district as well as the feasibility of developing the New Egypt Bike Path and connecting it to key local destinations.
- **Expansion of Transit Linkages on the Route 9 Corridor,** Middlesex County: Produces recommendations for expanded transit services to connect busy park and rides to major residential developments in Old Bridge, Sayreville and South River. ◆

"We expect that the study's findings will provide important lessons not just for Hudson County, but anywhere in our state that has a significant jitney presence."

—Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise, NJTPA Second Vice Chairman

NJTPA Study Examines Jitney Issues in Hudson County

THE NJTPA IS CONDUCTING a study that will identify ways to better integrate and regulate jitney operations throughout Hudson County. Jitneys are small buses that travel on fixed or semi-fixed routes, operate on flexible schedules, and have the ability to pick up and drop off riders along the way. The term jitney comes from an old-time name for the nickel, once a standard fare for riding.

While Hudson County commuters rely on these services, their rapid growth and a lack of local regulation have led to some complaints in Hudson County towns pertaining to safety issues, traffic congestion and competition with fixed-route transit operations.

"We expect that the study's findings will provide important lessons not just for Hudson County, but anywhere in our state that has a significant jitney presence," Hudson County Executive and NJTPA Second Vice Chairman Tom DeGise said.

The study builds on the work of the NJTPA's Hudson County Bus Circulation and Infrastructure Study, completed in 2007. The jitney study will undertake a more detailed analysis of jitneys, including a review of interstate and intrastate operations, and research into the legal options of regulating services. The project is expected to conclude this summer.

▶ A Middlesex County Area Transit shuttle picks up passengers in Old Bridge.

Middlesex Shuttles Fill Transit Gaps for Riders of All Needs

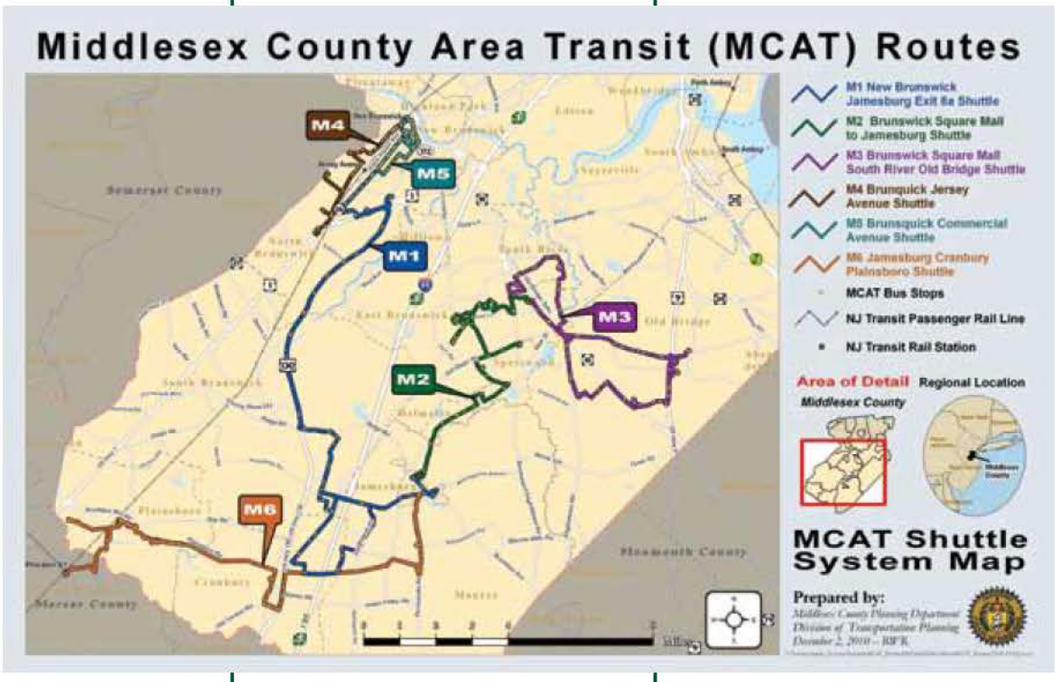
Middlesex County Area Transit's (MCAT) Community Shuttle Program has traveled a long way since its origin as a one-vehicle operation in 2004—500,000 miles last year alone, in fact.

Today, MCAT shuttles handle 325,000 passenger trips per year via a half-dozen routes that provide access to key destinations throughout the portion of the county south of the Raritan River. The routes, numbered M1 through M6, connect passengers from transit hubs to job centers, apartment complexes to shopping malls, age-restricted communities to hospitals. To assist riders with special needs, the shuttles can deviate from their routes upon advance request.

"We put our focus on making public transportation available in areas that are underserved," said Steven Fittante, Director of the Middlesex County Department of Transportation, which oversees MCAT.

To ensure the shuttles are accessible for all—particularly seniors on fixed incomes, the disabled and low-income residents—a modest fare is suggested, but not mandatory.

MCAT's original line, the M1, remains one of its flagship services. The 21-mile route (MCAT's longest) begins at New Brunswick Train Station, heads south through the Rutgers area, North and South Brunswicks and Jamesburg, terminating in the warehouse district near New Jersey Turnpike Exit 8A.



Over 40 percent of its trips in 2010 were for employment, largely in the 8A area.

A pair of other lines also terminate near 8A—the M2, which starts at Brunswick Square Mall in East Brunswick, and the M6, which stretches to Princeton Junction rail station, a stop that is actually in Mercer County.

The M4 "BrunsQuick" line is the system's most successful in terms of ridership, having recorded 113,000 passenger trips in 2010. The M4 is a localized urban shuttle that stops at key human services offices, Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, the New Brunswick and Jersey Avenue rail stations, and other destinations in North Brunswick and New Brunswick.

MCAT plans to launch a new line, the M7, by late this summer. The shuttle will run from the South Amboy rail station and waterfront to the Brunswick Square Mall, serving residential areas, employment centers, and commuter bus stops on Route 9.

The service recently began using global positioning system (GPS) technology and mobile computers to help measure the system's performance. With these tools, MCAT can track its vehicles and collect passenger data that will help it run the system more efficiently, according to Fittante.

Beyond rider fares, the system is supported by a combination of municipal and county funding, grants, donations, ad revenues and other sources. The NJTPA has provided federal funding for MCAT through the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) and New Freedom programs.

"MCAT's shuttles improve the quality of life for thousands of residents by providing reliable, affordable transportation to the places they need to reach most," said Middlesex County Freeholder and NJTPA Board member Charles E. Tomaro.

For more on MCAT's routes and other public transportation options in Middlesex County, visit KMM.org and click on the "Mass Transit" link. ◆

Maplewood Jitney Lines Grow in Popularity, Riders

Fourteen years after the Maplewood Jitney first hit the streets of this Essex County community, it's more popular than ever, transporting thousands of daily riders through the town's tree-lined streets to the local train station.

The service arose in response to a 1996 proposal to build a new parking lot at the Maplewood Station on the then-new MidTown Direct line. Ridership was growing, and local neighborhood streets around the station were becoming overwhelmed by parked cars. Eager to preserve the character of its historic rail station, Maplewood opted to provide jitney service to residents using grant money from a nonprofit. Another key attraction for commuters arose around the same time—a concierge service that would finish errands for riders by the time they returned to Maplewood.

The jitney saw somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 trips a day in its first few weeks, but grew rapidly. There are now three routes that serve the town (one stops in nearby Millburn). Riders can pay a $1 fare or get an annual pass for $80. The shuttle now handles approximately 7,800 individual trips every day.

Since 1999, NJ Transit has administered its Community Shuttle Program, funded through the NJTPA by the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program. It provides capital funding for buses and operating assistance for the first three years of a shuttle's existence. ◆

▼ Maplewood Township, Essex County, operates three shuttle routes between its local neighborhoods and the train station.

After Final Curtain

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services and works to secure grant funding to offset the costs.

"The companies who move out of New York City get a huge savings in real estate costs and they're happy to put a portion of that money toward transportation costs," Gupta said.

Although any member of the public can ride the shuttle, its main users are employees of Rose Brand and nearby ARRI CSC, a camera equipment supplier for the broadcast and film industries. The vehicles stop by the office every 10 minutes during the morning and evening rush hours.

"We got hit by the recession like everyone else, but we never even had a discussion about not paying for the shuttle," Gottlieb said. "That says a lot about what that service means to us right there."

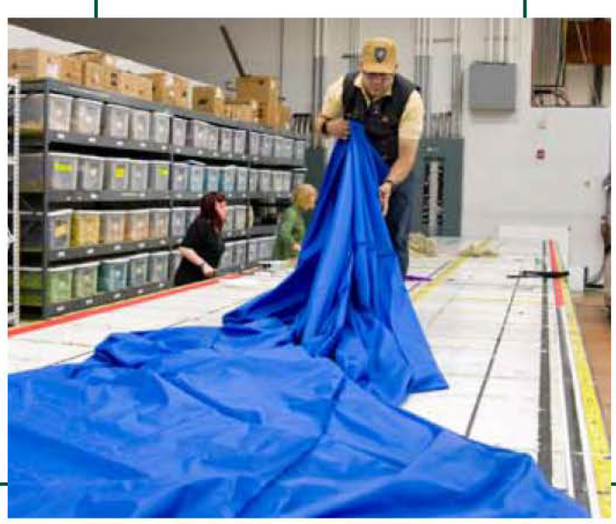
TMAs are private nonprofit organizations established to work with employers and governments to help provide more effective and efficient commuting and other transportation options. Northern New Jersey's seven TMAs work closely with the private sector, assisting companies with organizing vanpools, educating workers on their public transit options, providing emergency ride home programs, and many other resources.

Some other TMAs in the region are working to help workers finish their commutes via short-range shuttle services.

Morris County-based TransOptions has been working with tenants of the Giralda Farms corporate office complex, Madison, on expanding an existing shuttle service to and from Convent Train Station. The TMA helped launch the shuttle and ran it for several years before ultimately handing off control to the coalition of Giralda tenants, led by Maersk. TransOptions is now assisting the companies with examining pricing and service options from a private shuttle vendor.

Hudson TMA's Kearny Shuttle provides affordable round-trip service from the Harrison PATH station to North Arlington along the Frank E. Rodgers Boulevard/Kearny Avenue/Ridge Road corridor.

For more on the region's TMAs, visit NJTPA.org and enter "TMA" in the search box. ◆



◀ A Meadowlink shuttle line helped Rose Brand keep its workforce intact following a move from Manhattan to northern New Jersey.

Driving to Transit

▲ Park and rides like those at the Willowbrook Mall (top) in Wayne, Passaic County, and Metropark (right), Middlesex County, enable thousands of workers reach jobs in New York City each day.

Park and ride lots throughout the region serve as gathering points for drivers from far-flung areas, providing nearly 100,000 parking spots statewide in lots owned by NJ Transit, municipalities and private owners.

In some cases, driving to the bus or train is a challenge. Particularly at many train stations built in the densest parts of the region, parking is limited and towns are reluctant to expand parking for fear of attracting increased traffic. Commuters must arrive early in the morning to get a spot or put their name on waiting lists for a coveted parking permit.

NJ Transit in the last several years has eased the burdens through the creation of new lots in outlying locations, adjacent to highways. The agency is exploring new financing options, such as a greater role for the private sector, which may bring opportunities to expand capacity.

With a little homework and schedule juggling, residents in many areas of the region can find options to drive to the bus or train to avoid auto commuting.

The Wayne Route 23 Transit Center, opened in 2008, is an example of a regional park and ride that can serve commuters living in suburban areas. It is a multimodal center, with 1,000 parking spots near Routes 80, 46 and 23 where commuters can catch trains on the Montclair-Boonton rail line to New York Penn Station as well as buses to the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

Not far away is the Willowbrook Mall Park and Ride, where commuters can access over 800 green-lined spots set aside in the mall's parking lot to board buses to the Port Authority. Other shopping centers in the region, such the Freehold and Livingston malls, offer daily commuter parking.

Among the notable parking additions in the past two years were 1,100 privately operated spots opened at the Secaucus Junction station in 2009, a 477-space parking expansion at the Edison train station in 2010 and the 1,400-car parking deck opened in 2010 at the Harrison PATH rail station. Other major transit hubs that offer options for drivers are listed above.

Private bus companies offer numerous park and ride lots served by interstate bus routes. Academy Bus Company, for instance, operates along the Garden State Parkway with pickups at the PNC Bank Arts Center and rest areas along the route.

NJTransit.com offers detailed information on available parking at its stations. Google.com/transit also offers transit commuting options. ◆

Key Park & Ride Locations in North Jersey

- **METROPARK** (Woodbridge): 3,700 parking spots, access to NEC rail and local shuttle buses
- **VINCE LOMBARDI PARK AND RIDE** (near Turnpike Interchange 17): 1,000 parking spots, access to express buses
- **NORTH BERGEN PARK AND RIDE** (near the approach to the Lincoln Tunnel): 1,500 parking spaces served by express bus service to the New York Port Authority Bus Terminal
- **LIBERTY STATE PARK PARK AND RIDE** (Jersey City): 1,200 parking spots, access to Hudson-Bergen Light Rail, local buses
- **RAMSEY ROUTE 17 STATION**: 1,200-space parking deck, access to Bergen-Main rail line
- **MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY STATION**: 1,500-space parking deck, access to Montclair-Boonton rail line

The Station Cars with a Green Future?

STATION CARS—those notoriously beat-up second cars used daily for short trips to and from the bus or train—may be poised for a green makeover. The downside for drivers has always been that these old vehicles are gas guzzlers, and for society, that they're bad for the environment. Enter the electric vehicle.

The introduction of the Chevy Volt and Nissan Leaf in the fall—which each get the equivalent of almost 100 miles per gallon—has opened up a potential market for green station cars: park your EV at a charger-equipped park and ride lot and have it fully charged by the time you return.

Edison Parkfast has installed charging equipment at its parking lots at the Secaucus rail station and in lots in downtown Jersey City and Newark. The New Jersey Legislature is considering a six-bill package that would create incentives and requirements for charging stations throughout the state.

Transportation Agencies Take Steps to Make the Walk to Transit Easier, Safer

Whether it's a 500-foot trip from the car to the train platform or a brisk half-mile hike from home to the bus, nearly all transit trips begin or end with an exercise of shoe leather.

A significant share of NJ Transit capital spending focuses on the walking-transit interface, including upgrading train stations to include elevators and high-level platforms. Facilitating access for the disabled, elderly and others who may have mobility limitations is a key goal.

The placement and design of bus stops is also receiving attention. For example, the NJTPA just completed a study with NJ Transit exploring measures to improve safety for bus riders at many thousands of stops, such as pedestrian signs/signals, pavement markings and area illumination.

Towns and private companies are seeking to make "walkable to transit" a selling point for filling new homes, offices and retail outlets. Research suggests that people will generally walk about a quarter of a mile to stations. An NJ Transit report estimated a reasonable walking distance to be up to 15 minutes or up to one-half mile.

The walking environment also matters. The presence of pedestrian-friendly factors like safe and convenient sidewalks, good lighting and lively street life along the route have been found to encourage longer trips.

Improving the walking environment is a focus of "complete streets" policies which have been adopted by the state and a growing number of towns and counties. They encourage safer streets that lessen conflicts among cars, pedestrians and transit. "Creating a complete street means creating a place where people can consider alternatives to driving, such as taking the bus, biking or walking as a daily part of their lives," said Sussex County Freeholder and NJTPA Board member Susan M. Zellman. Sussex County will begin work on a complete streets study this summer (see page 3).

The NJTPA has also promoted improved pedestrian environments through a series of Walkable Community Workshops that allow local leaders, residents and police to tour areas together and discuss ways to make them safer. ◆

"Creating a complete street means creating a place where people can consider alternatives to driving, such as taking the bus, biking or walking as a daily part of their lives."

—Sussex County Freeholder Susan Zellman, NJTPA Board member

◀ Studies show a variety of factors, such as safe sidewalks and good lighting, can influence riders to walk further distances to transit.

NJ Transit Accommodations Help Riders Bike the First and Last Miles

NJ TRANSIT HAS STRIVED to accommodate bicyclists at its train stations and aboard its buses and trains, particularly since the 1992 debut of its "Bike Aboard" program. There's no extra charge or permit required for riders to bring bikes aboard NJ Transit vehicles.

About 90 percent of NJ Transit's train stations are equipped with bike parking racks and/or storage lockers, collectively providing room for more than 2,300 bikes. Here are some things for riders to know:

- The racks are free and the enclosed storage lockers can be rented—see signs on them for local contact information.
- Bikes are typically permitted aboard only during non-peak travel hours and always at the discretion of train crews.
- Bikes are allowed on "reverse peak" trains (those traveling against the primary commuter flow) even during peak periods.

- Bikes can only board at "accessible stations" with high-level platforms as indicated on the NJ Transit system maps and timetables and must use train doors identified with wheelchair symbol (usually the center doors).
- Lightweight folding or collapsible bikes usually can be brought aboard at any time.
- As part of the "Rack n' Roll" program, about half of NJ Transit's bus fleet have special bike racks on the front buses. Some buses may also have room for bikes in under-floor luggage compartments. Ask the driver to use the racks or compartments. No tandem bikes or child carriers.
- On-bus bike racks can be used at all times, but only two bikes can be accommodated at a time (first come).

For more on NJ Transit's Bike Aboard program, visit NJTransit.com and click the Rider Guide tab at the top of the page and then click Bike Program for details.

◀ NJ Transit has widened its accommodations in recent years for bus and train riders who wish to bring along bicycles.

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▶ Commuters arrive by bike, shuttle and car at Maplewood Train Station, Essex County.

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